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SUBJECT: MFA ON OSCE AND UNOMIG MISSIONS, INCIDENT
PREVENTION MECHANISM, GENEVA PROCESS, NAGORNO-KARABAKH

REF: A. TBILISI 808
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 1053

Classified By: Pol M/C Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In an April 28 meeting, MFA Fourth CIS Director Kelin showed no signs of flexibility on the OSCE mandate renewal. He downplayed prospects that a UN mandate for Abkhazia could be extended to South Ossetia, but predicted Russia's proposal for the UN mandate would "surprise" the West by the scope of its transparency. A UNOMIG redline will be Russia's insistence on its border guards securing the administrative boundary line, as per a GOR-Abkhazia security treaty. Kelin praised the results of the first Incident Prevention Mechanism meeting, and said DFM Karasin and EU Morel had subsequently reached agreement to co-chair the meetings, with Ergneti remaining the venue, and English and Russian the agreed languages. While Russia now fully supports the Geneva Process, Kelin downplayed humanitarian aid discussions, as South Ossetia already received all the aid it needed from Russia and the Red Cross. Kelin had low expectations for progress on Nagorno-Karabakh, but told us that that Medvedev's talk of "new approaches" that could "inject new notes" in resolution talks alluded to the offer that the Minsk Group co-chair countries guarantee peace in the Lachin corridor, obviating the need for an international peacekeeping mission. End Summary.

OSCE: "We're the most important"

[1](#)2. (C) In an April 28 meeting, MFA Fourth CIS Director Andrei Kelin showed no signs of flexibility on the OSCE mandate renewal, despite reiterating Russian support for an OSCE presence in South Ossetia. Asserting that the Greek proposal for one joint mission was unacceptable to South Ossetia, Kelin instead called for flexibility from the West. Acknowledging Russia was isolated in its opposition to the Greek compromise, Kelin stressed "I realize it's consensus minus one, but we're the most important." Maintaining that Russia could not force South Ossetia to accept OSCE monitors or status-neutral formulations in a mandate renewal decision, Kelin said the OSCE observers' record before the August 2008 conflict had rendered the South Ossetians stubborn and ideological, reducing Russia's influence. Dismissing as "technical" the issue of permitting monitors to cross the administrative boundary line (ABL) between South Ossetia and Georgia proper, Kelin said the substantive issue at hand was the combination of the three elements -- an OSCE mission in Tbilisi, observers in Georgia, and observers in South Ossetia -- in a manner acceptable to South Ossetia.

[1](#)3. (C) Kelin was skeptical about German and other proposals

that a UN mandate expand to cover South Ossetia, should the OSCE presence end. Geographic dissimilarities alone, he said, made it impossible apply a demilitarized and restricted weapons zone to South Ossetia. Tskhinvali was only 12 km from the ABL and could not be left vulnerable to a Georgian attack as was the case in August 2008. The irregular course of the ABL in South Ossetia also necessitated staffing a large number of border guard posts to control the many entry points.

14. (C) During our extended exchange on the virtues of Greece's creative ambiguity in circumventing status questions in its proposals and the importance of the OSCE mission on both sides of the ABL to provide transparency and increase confidence, Kelin only reiterated South Ossetia's "ideological" opposition to a mission that did not explicitly reference South Ossetia in its title, and warned that too much Russian pressure only entrenched South Ossetian resistance.

UNOMIG: "Our proposal will surprise you"

15. (C) Kelin said Russia was looking for a constructive approach in the UNOMIG mandate negotiations, and noted Abkhazia's desire to retain UNOMIG -- even if only to benefit from the jobs the UN's presence would create. Kelin repeated Lavrov's positive assessment of elements on the UNSYG's paper, but also underscored redlines. Both Russia and Abkhazia rejected the presence of UN police in Abkhazia, and

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started from the premise that Russian border guards would protect the "borders." Kelin said details of the border guard arrangements (as part of the broader defense MOU reached earlier with Abkhaz authorities) would be public "soon" and dismissed our objections to this breach of the August 12/September 8 agreements. Cautioning that the GOR was still forging interagency agreement on the counterproposal it planned to submit before the May 15 SYG report, he predicted "our proposal will surprise you" with regard to its degree of transparency.

Incident Prevention Mechanism: "Much accomplished"

16. (C) Kelin described the first meeting of the Incident Prevention Mechanism April 23 as a "good start" that had "accomplished much." He related that DFM Karasin and EU coordinator Pierre Morel had "resolved" a number of outstanding questions that remained after the meeting (ref A) in an April 27 telecon. The EU and Russia would co-chair the meetings, Ergneti would remain the venue, and English and Russian were the agreed languages for the mechanism. There was still discussion on whether to investigate all incidents since the August conflict, or only new ones as they occurred. With the next meeting set for the May 1-10 timeframe, Kelin said the international community should wait to see how the mechanism worked. Noting that the Mechanism foresaw the possibility of monitors crossing the ABL in order to investigate incidents, Kelin called for "prudence" in light of South Ossetian sensitivities toward the presence of Georgian monitors in South Ossetia, and vice versa.

Geneva Process: "No aid for aid's sake"

17. (C) Kelin was not concerned by the lack of progress in the second Geneva Process working group on humanitarian assistance. Deflecting our questions over Russian press reports on the abysmal state of South Ossetia's reconstruction, Kelin said Russia had resolved outstanding concerns over accountability and that audit commission

chairman Stepashin and Emergency Situations Minister Shoigu would travel to Tskhinvali to announce the breakthrough. Russia was prepared to meet the needs in South Ossetia. Noting Red Cross deliveries of assistance via Vladikavkaz, Kelin said South Ossetia had no need or desire for aid deliveries from Georgia "for aid's sake."

¶8. (C) In a departure from previous GOR statements, Kelin said Russia now fully supported the Geneva Process. There were not many venues for international discussion of Georgian issues, and the Geneva format allowed South Ossetia and Abkhazia to express their views and talk directly with Georgian authorities, Kelin said.

EUMM: "We don't read their reports"

¶9. (C) Kelin reiterated criticism of the EU Monitoring Mission, saying it was hard to judge its effectiveness since "we don't read the EUMM's reports." He complained that the EUMM observed but did not prevent incidents, and claimed it had done nothing about Georgian large-scale exercises at a tank training range west of Gori, which involved 28 tanks and 17 BMPs conducting live fire exercises since April 23. The MOU on the EUMM's activities was defective in allowing for significant military movements, Kelin said.

Georgia protests

¶10. (C) Kelin characterized the Georgian opposition as divided and leaderless, posing no real challenge to Saakashvili. The fact that Saakashvili would remain in power meant that Abkhazia and South Ossetia could continue to be spurred to deepen their independence. It was "inconceivable" that Medvedev and Putin would agree to engage with Saakashvili. Russia would support cooperation with Georgia on the cultural and humanitarian levels, although requests from the Georgia Orthodox Church for contact had revealed there was not much to discuss.

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Nagorno-Karabakh

¶11. (C) Kelin was pessimistic that the Turkey-Armenia rapprochement would help spur a Nagorno-Karabakh resolution, arguing instead that it had intensified Azerbaijan President Aliyev's suspicions. Russia favored the rapprochement, Kelin said, calling the prospective end to the blockade of Armenia economically beneficial and stressed the "no-win" situation that Russia found itself in with Aliyev. He confirmed that a meeting between Aliyev and Armenia President Sargsian on the margins of the St Petersburg Economic Forum in June was contingent on the outcome of their May 7 meeting in Prague. Kelin clarified that Medvedev's talk April 18 of "new approaches" that could "inject new notes" in resolution talks (ref B) alluded to the offer that the Minsk Group co-chair countries guarantee peace in the Lachin corridor, obviating the need for an international peacekeeping mission. There were no Russian proposals that bypassed the Minsk Group, Kelin said.

¶12. (C) Kelin reiterated that accusations of Russian arms sales to Armenia were forged, and claimed Azerbaijan finally had accepted this, too. Kelin contended the notion of "sales" was unrealistic, as Armenia did not have money to buy arms, and the amount of equipment in Armenia already approached CFE ceilings. However, certain circles in both Azerbaijan and Armenia opposed the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the disinformation campaign was designed to raise suspicions at a critical moment in the

negotiations.
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